

## Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

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DCS Communications Office

**June 10, 2005**

### The Week Ahead

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**Tues., June 14** – The Commissioner attends the signing of the CPS Reform Bill with Gov. Phil Bredesen at the state Capitol.

### Commissioner Moves Up in Ranking of State's Most Powerful

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*Business TN* recently announced its list of the 100 most powerful Tennesseans. This year, DCS Commissioner Viola P. Miller was ranked 88<sup>th</sup> and described as a “nationally respected children’s services guru who was on her way to a top job in Georgia when Gov. Phil Bredesen snagged her to lead Tennessee’s system.”

For more on the most powerful Tennesseans, visit [www.businessstn.com](http://www.businessstn.com).

### Volunteers Sign Up for Council on Accreditation Team

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*Submitted by Brenda B. Bell, Program Director, Compliance with Juvenile Justice, Blue Ribbon Team*

The call for volunteers to form the Council on Accreditation (COA) Core Team went out across the state and an enthusiastic group of individuals stepped forward to answer that call. COA Core Team members represent case managers, team leaders, team coordinators, regional administrators and members of the Core Leadership Team (CLT). Also, joining with us are representatives from some of the community services agencies (CSAs), several private providers and Metro Nashville-Davidson County Social Services.

Members of the COA Core Team include Sandra Holder, Janice Clardy, Kirk Lane, Tracy Watkins, Tonni L. Chew, Traci Brignac, Janie Alexander, Mildred Y. Lawhorn, Cindy Holt, Karen J. Harmon, Rebecca Taylor-Sturdivant, Sandra Jordan, Carla Forsyth, Cheri Richards, Rebecca Adcock, Linda Fenderson-Doss, Valerie Handy, Beth Kasch, Donna Johnson, Ken Steverson, Willie L. Robinson, Johnny Stewart, Judy Cole, Brennan Francois, Suzanne White, Mark Anderson, Kay Montgomery, Stacy Miller, Ken Sanders, Lane Simpson, William Haynes, Jackie Lee, Steve Hornsby, Daryl Chansuthus, Ike Davis, Nancy Bean, Richard Klarberg, Jim Mooney, Tom Riche, Nita Mangum (Senior Services), Kevin Duvall (New Life Lodge), Michael Hullett (Therapeutic Interventions), Gerri Robinson (Metro Social Services), Marilyn Smith (Mid-Cumberland CSA), Commissioner Viola P. Miller and Brenda B. Bell.



*Members of the COA Core Team strike a pose.*

Over the coming weeks, we will share information about the Council on Accreditation and the COA Core Team members, and update you on the activities of each COA Core Team.

Regional Administrator Kitty Oliver hosted a COA kickoff in Dresden, Tenn. COA Core Team leaders Cindy Holt, Tracy Brignac, Mildred Lawhorn and staff from the Southwest and Northwest regions came together to begin to learn about accreditation through COA. They wanted to understand how DCS could utilize COA accreditation to become stronger in terms of the services we provide and in regard to strengthening our organizational structure. Each team began to discuss a program service area, including case management services, respite services and crisis intervention services, with each team analyzing how the design and delivery of our services relates to COA standards.

### **Marching Forward**

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*Submitted by Commissioner Viola P. Miller*

DCS has made major improvements in our child welfare system. We have much to be proud of, including a new Practice Model, a statewide continuous quality improvement (CQI) process, child and family team meetings (CFTMs), right-sized regions reducing caseloads, significant reductions in CPS past dues, functional assessment, pre-service certification training, multiple Team Excellence initiatives, an undergraduate certification program, an MSW stipend program, regional Path to Excellence (P2E) implementation plans, extensive management data reports ...

And the list could go on and on.

There are still two major areas where we are struggling. Our permanency plans continue to be “cookie cutter.” They are not yet reflective of best practice with a family-focused, child-centered, strengths-based, culturally responsive emphasis. We continue to use goals like, “complete parenting class, A&D treatment, family counseling.” These are not goals, but rather activities to meet goals that will ensure that children are safe, living in a family setting and nurtured. We lack specific reference to the behaviors (strengths-based) that we expect from families and that families are our partners in developing.

Our other area of real weakness is in the stability that children experience while in our care. We are about 20 points below the national standard in the percentage of our children in care who have no more than two different placements. This finding is huge and reflects a major best practice that we must find ways to address and address quickly. We all know that the most damaging thing that we can do to a child is to remove him/her from the birth family. The second most damaging is moving the child again. There are those times when, for the child's well being, we must decide to remove that child. However, we have an obligation to minimize the trauma and make every effort to do as little damage as possible. When we repeatedly change a child's placement, we do harm.

Please take these two issues to your CQI teams for discussion and plans for improvement. If you come up with good ideas, let us know so that we can print them in the Weekly Wrap Up. We are all in this important work together and must help and support each other as we try everyday to do our work a little bit better. Let me hear from you on these issues. We have some very talented people in DCS who can help find ways to move the agency toward best practices for our families and children. They are, after all, what we are all about.

If anyone has examples of good quality, strengths-based permanency plans that can be redacted and sent out as examples, please feel free to share them with me.

## **Recruitment, Retention and Support Update**

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*Submitted by Servella Terry, Director, Recruitment, Retention and Support*

In the Office of Child Permanency, the accelerated Recruitment, Retention and Support Division is still in the infancy stage and is working very hard on developing an effective infrastructure. We are committed to provide technical assistance to the regions assisting them to recruit a pool

of culturally sensitive, family-focused and neighborhood-based resource homes. Our goal is to have each region to recruit one home for every two children who are represented in our system.

We are very pleased to announce Karen Harmon, Betty Byrd, Karen Nichols, Wayne Casteel, Brayan Bunyi, Erin Parker, Carolyn Todd, Tawanna Leland, Brenda Peel, Dorothy Fults, Cindy Holt and Jennifer Morgan as members of the recruitment Team of Excellence. The Team of Excellence will be working with this division to ensure that communication and information is shared with their regional staff in a timely manner.

In April, Denise Goodman, an independent consultant, provided child-specific training for recruitment staff, supervisors and the Center for Adoption. Recruitment flyers were mailed out in all state employees' paychecks on May 15 – the first time in the history of the Department of Children's Services that this has been accomplished. In recognition of May's Foster Care Awareness Month, 12 foster families from across the state were selected by their region to be honored and recognized for the great work they do for our children in care. This event took place on May 26 at the Downtown City Center in Nashville. Governor Bredesen and Commissioner Viola Miller welcomed our foster parents. In addition, the foster parents were given the opportunity to take photos with the Governor and the Commissioner. The foster parents were presented with souvenir clocks honoring our appreciation and valuing them as part of foster care service team. The event was well attended by staff and local community partners. We plan to make this an annual event.

Recruitment and retention are everyone's job. This means that recruitment and retention will be seen as the job of everybody who works for the Department of Children's Services. In fact, every staff person should be expected to work as a team member as we recruit and retain quality resource homes. To ensure the retention of resource homes, it is important for us as an agency to return phone calls as soon as possible, offer respite, provide words of encouragement, provide appropriate training, and respect our resource homes.

Scott Lee is chairing a FHACP workgroup to focus on developing accurate reports about the availability of resource homes in Tennessee. This is a critical component in our effort to recruit and retain the number and type of resource homes that are needed for children in Tennessee, as well as our effort to build a unified placement system. We are scheduled to meet weekly until we have resolved foster home data reporting issues.

Our division maintains an active role in assisting the regions to operationalize their diligent recruitment plans. We are particularly interested in seeing Tennessee do a better job with targeted and child-specific recruitment.



